

Mark, chap. 7, ver. 37. "He maketh both the Deaf to hear, and the Dumb to Speak."

It is of little moment what was the immediate allusion of these words; the general import is, the Omnipotence of God, who can alter at his pleasure the face of Nature, subvert the order of things, bring the dead to life, make both the Deaf to hear, and the Dumb to Speak. "We are the work of God's hands." Having bestowed on mankind the gifts of hearing and of sight, he has given us also the power of Speech, and for the same end, that of rendering man happy, and a social being; making him useful to himself, and serviceable to his fellow-creatures.

The face of nature, is, of itself, as the Prophet expresses it, "a speaking volume." If we consider man in a figurative sense, we shall find, that the various parts of his body comprise the whole property of nature, and correspond with that. Answerable to the four seasons, are his several ages; to the elements, his passions; to the animal and vegetable kingdoms, his propensities and growth. His senses take in the whole scope of Creation. The night is represented by his sleep---Rest is for nature, and rest is for man. The day is denoted by his hours of work. The moon has no pro-



perty, but man has the same; its changes from new to full; its increase, its wane, and disappearance are alike in him. Shall Man, then, the express image of his wise Creator, be negligent in giving thanks and praise, that though Creation is God's greatest work, He has within himself a world complete?

All nature has a voice, and shall man want this perfection? No; he is the lord of the Creation, and could not rule without it. Setting aside this, he would want means to convey his ideas---he would be wretched, and little better than the beasts of the forest.

As I have done, then, before with the gifts of hearing and of sight, so will I now enumerate the blessings accompanying the gift of Speech, and the calamities attendant on the want of it. This done, I will shew how grateful we ought to be to the Bestower of so great a gift, and the proper uses we should make of it.

By Speech, then, in the first instance, man is enabled to communicate his ideas to his fellow-creatures, and by his faculty of hearing, to receive theirs in return; of course, it tends to civilize and soften down the roughness of his nature, to make him sympathise with the distresses of others, and give him a fellow-feeling. He is thus enabled to communicate his wants to man, to obtain his assistance, and consult him in cases of necessity. Man being formed for society, Speech is the first principle that leads him to it. By this, he can divide his sorrows with the partner of his bosom, and lay open his misfortunes to those who can relieve him; and as the simple language of nature is most eloquent, the untaught tongue is most likely to utter words that shall reach the heart.

By Speech he can communicate information, and it is information that improves the mind. Without Speech there would have



been no language, and without language there would have been no books; of course, men would have been now, as were the barbarians of former ages---little better than savages.

But not to dwell on probable misfortunes, I will enumerate the blessings which result from the ability of speaking well, aided by the power of reason and judgment; and then the calamity attendant on a people in the want of Speech, will be more evident.

By Speech, man is enabled to become as well an advocate for God, as for himself, in the holy functions of divinity. It is by this that the doctrines of religion have been promulgated. Consider for a moment, the excellent plans of religious truths that have been drawn up in a practical discourse, and delivered from the pulpit with eloquence and grace, and you will soon be convinced of the good effects of Speech. What wonders has it effected in a state! What good has it brought about in private life! Speech improved by education and aided by a good memory, a lively disposition, an harmonious voice, good gesture, and an elegant flow of words, is called Eloquence; and its power on the human passions, when well managed, is little less than Omnipotent: it will smooth the rugged, soften the adamant, and bend the inflexible. It will convince the obstinate, rouse the lukewarm, quiet the ferocious, give animation to the coward, and in all situations of life, alter our very way of thinking. Such has been the power of ancient oratory, that no ear could withstand it. The greatest prejudices fall before it, and by it, the most inveterate hatred has been converted into love.

If such be the power of Eloquence, how dangerous is it in the mouth of a wicked man! With your powers of eloquence, then, learn to be virtuous, and your oratory will have still greater efficacy.



It will have the weight of truth and sincerity to support it. When St. Paul preached, every word spoke conviction to his hearers, and why? Because he believed the truths he uttered; felt the power of them himself, and delivered them with that emotion, as witnessed the truth of what he spoke; and "as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix (his judge) trembled." Oh! could I preach like St. Paul, you should soon feel the persuasive energy of my tongue.

The oratory of the bar is often well applied, I mean when it pleads the cause of justice, and in defence of oppressed innocence; but when used to pervert judgment, disguise truth, and support error; when fallacious arguments are brought forth to deceive and to calumniate, it is dreadful in the extreme.

The oratory of the stage is of another kind; and when it tends to reprove vice, to laugh folly out of countenance, and recommend virtue, it is highly praise-worthy. Sensible men have remarked, that owing to the inattention and indolence of preachers, the fictions of the stage have penetrated men's hearts, at least for the time, much deeper than truths delivered from the pulpit. The theatre, therefore, under good regulation, is far from an immoral or injurious entertainment.

If such then be the powers of Speech, how deplorable to people must be the want of it! Signs and gestures might make a shift in private life, to communicate our present wants to those about us; but signs and gestures cannot extend to the improvement of men's minds, nor extend their influence to distant eyes. Where there is no Speech, as I have observed, there can be no language; and if no oral language, of course, no written one; and without a written



language, that is to say, where books and writings are unknown, the people remain in a state of barbarism. Cast your thoughts on the savages of Africa and America.---What continues them in the same barbarous state, as in the early ages of the world? Not want of Speech, but want of learning and improvement. Were they deprived of Speech, they would be more savage than they are. Neither the laws of God, of nature, or of nations, much less the laws of policy would reach them; their lives, like a troubled sea in a boisterous element, disturbed by passions, would rage without controul; and like the beasts of the forest, they would on many occasions exercise their strength with savage cruelty. It is learning that civilizes mankind; it is the ties of social friendship that humanizes man, and that friendship could not be extended without the gift of Speech. We might form attachments, but these would be confined, and would not spread to answer any purpose. I may say, therefore, that not only the welfare of states, but the salvation of man, in a great measure, depends upon Speech. How great a reverence therefore ought we to entertain of it, and how careful not to prostitute it to evil purposes!

How then can man be said to prostitute this blessing? Several ways:

1. By uttering untruths and speaking truths that are injurious.
2. By swearing falsely or idly.
3. By abusive language.

1. By uttering untruths, or speaking truths that are injurious. It has been said, that a beneficial falsity is preferable to a destructive truth; but both are bad. "We are not to do evil, that good may



come ;" of course, are not justifiable in telling lies even to do good. That we may be able to determine what a lie is, it may be thus defined : A lie is a falsity, where we are bound in honour, and in justice to speak the truth and the truth only. Where a wife, a child, or servant is bound to give true information, and speaks so as to deceive, it is a lie ; and where a master who is bound to instruct a person under him, misleads or deceives him, he is guilty of the same ; but where a man is not bound to give true information, and rather than give offence to an enquirer, speaks so as to deceive ! 'tis a falsity no doubt, but a falsity no way criminal. Lies, however, are a prostitution of Speech, and highly criminal in the speaker.

Under this head, I must class defamers, and those who speak to the injury of others. When giving a character, we are bound to speak the truth, if asked ; and though the truth may tend to the injury of those you speak of, they must attribute that injury to their own deserts. If we give a false character, we injure the person to whom that character is given, and are certainly criminal in so doing.

2. Oaths, unless formally, and taken in conformity to law, are an abuse of Speech. In judicial oaths, the whole truth must be spoken, and nothing but the truth ; but habitual and common swearing is such an offence to God and so great a prostitution of the gift of Speech, that instances may be given, where they have been used to give credit to untruths, that persons so swearing have undergone the immediate judgment of Heaven, and have been instantly struck dumb for their presumption. But should such escape a present judgment, they will most assuredly (without repentance) be punished for it hereafter.



3. *Abusive language*, though perhaps not partaking of moral turpitude, is such a mark of vulgarity and low breeding, such a disgrace to every one who bears the name of Gentleman, that I should suppose it was not necessary to say more upon the subject, than that it is disgraceful even to those who associate with such kind of people.

I must not omit another kind of evil speaking, that of gossiping and intermeddling, unsolicited, in concerns that no way belong to them; where the meddler does a great deal of mischief, and often disturbs the peace of families.

Were I to enter into all the modes of evil-speaking it would take me an hour or two, but what I have said is sufficient to shew what is meant by the perversion and prostitution of speech; and a man had better be dumb than throw out poison with his words. It is an ungrateful return for so beneficial a gift, and will be sure to meet with its reward hereafter. Brotherly love and charity are the duty of all men, and, as St. Paul very justly observes, "If we speak with the tongues of angels and have not charity, it profiteth us nothing; we are but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Let us use, then, our Speech to the end for which it was given; consider that we are not born for ourselves alone, that as social beings, after consulting our own happiness, we are to endeavour to make others happy. With this view, let us address the afflicted with the voice of compassion, with sympathetic accents, with consolatory words of comfort and condolence; let us address our families with tenderness of expression, in terms of affectionate regard and friendly admonition; let us hold out threats of vengeance to the obstinate and comfortable doctrine to the broken-



hearted; let us condole with the unfortunate, and congratulate the successful. When speaking before men in the cause of oppressed innocence, let us exalt our voice and use all the powers of eloquence, to remove prejudices, reconcile seeming inconsistencies, develop truth and clear it from the mass of error: but in our address to God, let us with depression of voice, with the utmost humiliation, in tones of devout invocation, repentance, and sorrow, and with fervency of prayer, implore his forgiveness of our sins, and deprecate his avenging hand. And for all the benefits that we have received, and the manifold gifts he has bestowed upon us, let us chaunt out his praises in songs of thankfulness and strains of never-ceasing gratitude.

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